

Message Text

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DRAFTED BY:GAO:ELMER B.STAATS

APPROVED BY:A/BF/OAG:DLQUAID,JR.

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMCONSUL SAO PAULO IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S REMARKS

1. FOLLOWING TEXT OF COMPTROLLER GENERAL ELMER B. STAATS' REMARKS FOR DELIVERY BY CONGEN AT CEREMONIES NEXT WEEK.

BEGIN TEXT: "IT IS A GREAT PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS THIS GATHERING ON THIS MOST IMPORTANT OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL INAUGURATION OF THE BUILDING WHICH IS TO BE THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE COURT OF JUSTICE OF SAO PAULO. I REGRET DEEPLY THAT I CANNOT BE PRESENT IN PERSON TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INAUGURAL PROGRAM. HOWEVER, I AM PLEASED TO PROVIDE A PAPER FOR THE OCCASION TO BE PRESENTED TO YOU.

FIRST, I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER MY PERSONAL CONGRATULATIONS ON THE COMPLETION OF YOUR FINE BUILDING. I KNOW IT IS A GRATIFYING ACHIEVEMENT TO OBTAIN NEW AND MODERN FACILITIES TO HELP CARRY OUT THE IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITIES THAT ARE ASSIGNED TO THE OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES WHO WILL OCCUPY IT.

I WISH TO SAY ALSO THAT I AM PLEASED TO BE REPRESENTED ON THE SAME PROGRAM WITH SEVERAL OF MY DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES IN THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF SUPREME AUDIT INSTITUTIONS WHO HEAD THE NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.
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EXMO. SENOR SERVANDO FERNANDES-VICTORIO Y CAMPS OF SPAIN

MR. D. ARNAUD OF FRANCE

MR. H. VREBOS OF BELGIUM

DR. JOSE ANDRES OCTAVIO OF VENEZUELA

GENERAL OSCAR VARGAS PRIETO OF PERU
AND
OF BRAZIL

THIS INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION IS DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT
OF THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENTAL AUDITING IN ALL MEMBER COUNTRIES
AND THE MEMBERS WHO ARE PARTICIPATING IN THIS SERIES OF LECTURES WILL,

I KNOW, HAVE MUCH TO CONTRIBUTE.

THE UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE, WHICH I HEAD,
IS THE INDEPENDENT AGENCY IN THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH OF THE GOVERNMENT

I SERVE WHICH AUDITS THE AFFAIRS OF OUR FEDERAL AGENCIES.
I HAVE BEEN INVITED TO DISCUSS UPON THIS OCCASION THE RELATIONS
BETWEEN OUR OFFICE AND THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

FINDING WAYS TO RUN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT--A \$400 BIL-
LION ENTERPRISE--AS EFFICIENTLY, EFFECTIVELY, AND ECONOMICALLY
AS POSSIBLE IS ONE OF THE GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THIS OFFICE.

THIS AGENCY WAS ESTABLISHED BY THE BUDGET AND ACCOUNTING ACT
IN 1921 AS AN INDEPENDENT, NONPOLITICAL ARM OF THE CONGRESS.
IT EVOLVED FROM EARLIER ATTEMPTS OF THE CONGRESS, DATING BACK
TO 1775, TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF MANAGEMENT AND CON-
TROL FOR THE THEN NEW FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL OPERATIONS.

THE PURPOSE OF THE 1921 LAW WAS "TO PROVIDE A NATIONAL BUD-
GET SYSTEM AND AN INDEPENDENT AUDIT OF GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTS".
TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS, THE ACT ALSO ESTABLISHED A NEW
BUREAU OF THE BUDGET TO COMPILE THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET.

THE ACT INSULATED THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL AS HEAD OF THE GEN-
ERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE AGAINST POLITICAL PRESSURES WITH A
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15-YEAR APPOINTMENT BY THE PRESIDENT, SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION
BY THE SENATE. SINCE THE PRESIDENT CANNOT REMOVE HIM FROM OFFICE,
THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL AND THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE ARE
PLACED BEYOND PRESIDENTIAL CONTROL. HE CANNOT BE REMOVED BY CON-
GRESS EXCEPT FOR CAUSE. THESE PROVISIONS GO FAR TO GUARANTEE
THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S INDEPENDENCE FROM POLITICAL INFLUENCE.

THE BUDGET AND ACCOUNTING ACT OF 1921 REFLECTED THE CONSISTENT
BELIEF THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES THAT
CONTROL OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S FUNDS SHOULD BE VESTED
IN THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
TAXPAYERS.

OBJECTIVES

BROADLY SPEAKING, THE OBJECTIVES OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM THE NEEDS OF THE CONGRESS FOR INFORMATION AND ADVICE AS IT CARRIES OUT ITS LEGISLATIVE AND OVERSIGHT RESPONSIBILITIES. IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO THE CONGRESS ON A REQUEST BASIS, THE OFFICE CARRIES OUT UNDER ITS OWN BROAD MANDATE INDEPENDENT RESPONSIBILITIES TO RENDER LEGAL OPINIONS, PRESCRIBE ACCOUNTING PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, TO REVIEW FEDERAL OPERATIONS ON ITS OWN INITIATIVE, AND PREPARE ANALYSES FOR THE CONGRESS.

A CONCERN FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED IN THE CONGRESS IS THAT THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS INCREASED ITS POWER IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH HAS MOST OF THE EXPERTS AND INFORMATION ON SUCH COMPLEX SUBJECTS AS MAJOR WEAPONS SYSTEMS, ATOMIC ENERGY, SPACE EXPLORATION, AND POLLUTION CONTROL.

MANY OF THESE EXPERTS AND MUCH OF THE INFORMATION FROM THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH ARE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE CONGRESS THROUGH HEARINGS AND REPORTS, OR BY LESS FORMAL MEANS. HOWEVER, QUESTIONS REMAIN SUCH AS:

--WERE THE PROPER ALTERNATIVES TO PROPOSED PROGRAMS FULLY CONSIDERED AND SET FORTH OBJECTIVELY TO THE CONGRESS?

--DOES THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH KEEP THE CONGRESS ADEQUATELY ADVISED
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ON PROGRESS AND ON PROBLEMS WHICH DEVELOP AS PROGRAMS ARE CARRIED OUT?

--DOES THE INFORMATION PROVIDED FACILITATE, RATHER THAN FRUSTRATE, LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT?

IT IS THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S OBJECTIVE TO STRENGTHEN, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, THE PROCESSES THROUGH WHICH THE CONGRESS CAN OBTAIN RELIABLE INFORMATION. THIS MEANS THAT THE WORK OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE MUST ALWAYS BE RELEVANT TO THE NEEDS OF THE CONGRESS. TO THIS END, IT MAKES STRENUOUS EFFORTS TO FORESEE THE NEEDS OF THE CONGRESS AND TO MAKE ITS INFORMATION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS AVAILABLE ON A TIMELY BASIS IN ORDER TO BE RELEVANT AND USEFUL TO THE WORK OF THE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.

THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE DOES NOT HAVE THE OBJECTIVE TO BECOME THE "THINK TANK" FOR THE CONGRESS ON THE BEST SOLUTIONS TO PRESSING NATIONAL PROBLEMS. NOR DOES IT ASSESS OVERALL NATIONAL PROGRAM PRIORITIES OR BUDGET-FUNDING REQUIREMENTS. THE LEGISLATIVE REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1970 AND THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET AND IMPOUNDMENT CONTROL ACT OF 1974, HOWEVER, DID UNDER-

SCORE THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE PREPARATION OF PROGRAM ANALYSES AND EVALUATIONS PROVIDING TIMELY INFORMATION NEEDED BY THE CONGRESS IN ALL PHASES OF ITS WORK. WHILE THE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS PROCESSES ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN DETERMINING NATIONAL PRIORITIES, THE CONGRESS' OVERSIGHT AND AUTHORIZING RESPONSIBILITIES ARE YET MORE BASIC. SEVERAL TITLES OF THE 1974 ACT GIVE THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE MAJOR ROLES IN SUPPORT OF ALL THESE PROCESSES.

THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS BECOME MUCH MORE COMPLEX SINCE THE CONGRESS ESTABLISHED THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE MORE THAN 50 YEARS AGO. THE NEEDS OF THE CONGRESS FOR HELP HAVE GROWN AND WILL CONTINUE TO GROW.

THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE IS TO PROVIDE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS SUCH AS:

--IS IT POSSIBLE TO ELIMINATE WASTE AND THE INEFFICIENT
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USE OF PUBLIC MONEY?

--ARE FEDERAL PROGRAMS, WHETHER ADMINISTERED DIRECTLY BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OR THROUGH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS THE UNITED NATIONS, OR THROUGH STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, ACHIEVING THEIR OBJECTIVES?

--ARE THERE OTHER WAYS OF ACCOMPLISHING THE OBJECTIVES OF THESE PROGRAMS AT LOWER COSTS?

--ARE FUNDS BEING SPENT LEGALLY? AND IS THE ACCOUNTING SYSTEM FOR THEM ADEQUATE?

IN SHORT, THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE'S OBJECTIVE IS

--TO RECOMMEND WAYS OF MAKING BOTH PROPOSED AND ONGOING FEDERAL PROGRAMS WORK BETTER,

--TO ASSIST IN THE PROCESS OF PROGRAM CHOICE, AND

--TO MAKE THE RESULTS OF ITS STUDIES KNOWN BEFORE DECISIONS ARE REACHED.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT WHEN THERE ARE STRONG PRESSURES TO MOVE TO NEW AND UNTRIED APPROACHES OR TO INFUSE MORE MONEY INTO PROGRAMS THAT HAVE NOT YET DEMONSTRATED THEIR WORTH.

THE FIRST AND FOREMOST RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROVIDING THIS TYPE OF INFORMATION TO THE CONGRESS RESTS, AS IT SHOULD, WITH THE OPERATING AGENCIES THEMSELVES. THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE CAN ADVISE THE CONGRESS ON HOW WELL IT THINKS THE AGENCIES HAVE DONE THEIR JOBS OF EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR

PROGRAMS. IT CAN SUPPLEMENT THEIR EFFORTS AND GO MORE DEEPLY INTO PROBLEMS WHICH MAY NOT HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH ADEQUATELY BY THE AGENCIES.

SINCE THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE PERFORMS MUCH OF ITS WORK WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF IMPROVING GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, FEDERAL AGENCIES TAKE MANY ACTIONS AS A RESULT OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAKE THEIR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES LESS EXPENSIVE AND MORE USEFUL.

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DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO THE CONGRESS

THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE VIEWS ALMOST ALL OF ITS WORK AS ASSISTANCE TO THE CONGRESS IN CARRYING OUT ITS LEGISLATIVE AND OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS. HOWEVER, CERTAIN WORK OF THE OFFICE DIRECTLY ASSISTS THE CONGRESS. THIS WORK INCLUDES:

--MAKING SPECIFIC SURVEYS, REVIEWS, AND STUDIES DIRECTED BY LAW.

--MAKING SPECIFIC SURVEYS, AUDITS AND REVIEWS REQUESTED BY CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES AND INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS OR RECOMMENDED IN COMMITTEE REPORTS.

--PROVIDING INFORMATION AND LEGAL SERVICES RELATING TO GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND POLICIES TO CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS THROUGH FORMAL TESTIMONY, INFORMAL CONFERENCES, REPORTS ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION, AND INTERPRETATION OF STATUTES.

--PROVIDING ADVISORY ASSISTANCE IN DEVELOPING AND DRAFTING LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS.

--ASSIGNING STAFF MEMBERS TO DIRECTLY ASSIST CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.

IN FISCAL YEAR 1976 ABOUT 34 PERCENT OF THE WORK OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE OF APPROXIMATELY 4100 FELL IN THE CATEGORY OF DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO THE CONGRESS.

A BASIC POLICY OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE IS TO BE AS HELPFUL AS POSSIBLE TO ALL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WITHIN THE CONFINES OF STAFF RESOURCES AND OTHER WORK REQUIREMENTS AND STILL PRESERVE THE STATUS OF THE OFFICE AS AN INDEPENDENT, NON-POLITICAL AGENCY.

IT DOES RESPOND TO REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION FROM INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS. THIS PRACTICE IS IN KEEPING WITH THE NON-POLITICAL, BIPARTISAN CHARACTER OF THE OFFICE, SINCE IT AVOIDS THE IMPLICATION THAT IT LIMITS ITS ASSISTANCE TO A PARTICULAR POLITICAL PARTY IN THE CONGRESS BY RESPONDING ONLY TO REQUESTS

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MADE BY COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN.

SOMETIMES THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY A MEMBER OF CONGRESS HAVE BROADER IMPLICATIONS THAN THE CONCERN OF A PARTICULAR STATE, CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, OR CONSTITUENT. THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE JUDGES EACH REQUEST FROM THIS STANDPOINT. SOMETIMES MORE COMPREHENSIVE STUDIES OF MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR PROCEDURES ARE MADE THAT COME TO THE OFFICE'S ATTENTION THROUGH A LIMITED REQUEST.

THE QUESTION IS SOMETIMES RAISED AS TO WHETHER THE HANDLING OF REQUESTS FROM INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS INTERFERES WITH THE CONDUCT OF OTHER AUDIT WORK. THIS SOMETIMES HAPPENS SINCE MOST CONGRESSIONAL REQUEST WORK IS GIVEN PRIORITY. THE OBJECTIVE IS TO PROVIDE SERVICE AND TO HELP MEMBERS OF CONGRESS OBTAIN NEEDED INFORMATION AS SPEEDILY AND EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE BUT EVERY EFFORT IS MADE TO DO THIS WITHOUT ADVERSELY AFFECTING OTHER WORK WHICH IS BELIEVED TO WARRANT PRIORITY ATTENTION OR WHICH CAN BE EXPECTED TO RESULT IN MAJOR ECONOMIES OR IMPROVEMENTS.

IN DETERMINING WHAT THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE WILL DO IN ANY GIVEN CASE, THE AVAILABILITY OF THE REQUESTED INFORMATION IN THE AGENCY CONCERNED OR THE POSSIBILITY THAT A RESPONSE MIGHT BETTER BE MADE BY THE AGENCY IS CONSIDERED AND DISCUSSED WITH THE REQUESTING MEMBER OF CONGRESS. ALSO, IN SOME CASES, A REQUESTER'S NEEDS MAY BE SATISFIED BY PROVIDING COPIES OF REPORTS ON RELATED AUDITS OR INVESTIGATIONS.

DECIDING WHAT AUDITS TO MAKE

ALTHOUGH THE MAJOR REASON FOR MAKING AN AUDIT OF A SPECIFIC GOVERNMENT PROGRAM IS WHETHER FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS WILL CONSTRUCTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVEMENTS, OTHER FACTORS ARE ALSO CONSIDERED. CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST IS ALWAYS PARAMOUNT. BUT THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE OFFICIALS ALSO PAY ATTENTION TO PUBLIC CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS SUCH AS THE IMPACT OR SIZE OF PROGRAMS.

IN RECENT YEARS THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE HAS PREPARED MANY REPORTS ON SUCH PROGRAMS AS FEDERAL HEALTH PROGRAMS,
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CONSUMER PROTECTION, COMPUTERS, FOREIGN AID, MILITARY WEAPON SYSTEMS, AND TRANSPORTATION. AN AREA OF MAJOR CURRENT CONCERN IS GOVERNMENT ENERGY POLICY: THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE HAS REPORTED ON OIL AND GAS LEASING ON THE OUTER CONTINENTAL SHELF, NUCLEAR REACTORS, NATURAL GAS, AND COAL, AS WELL AS ASSESSING THE OPERATIONS OF THE FEDERAL ENERGY ADMINISTRATION.

ITS WORK FREQUENTLY TAKES THE OFFICE INTO SENSITIVE AND CONTROVERSIAL AREAS. FOR EXAMPLE, AT THE REQUEST OF A CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE, THE OFFICE CONDUCTED THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION'S DOMESTIC INTELLIGENCE PROGRAM. SHORTLY AFTER THIS WORK WAS BEGUN, THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES EACH ESTABLISHED A SELECT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES OF THE VARIOUS FEDERAL AGENCIES, INCLUDING THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION. THE OFFICE COORDINATED ITS WORK CLOSELY WITH THESE COMMITTEES. IN ITS REPORT ISSUED IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR, THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE MADE SEVERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CONGRESS FOR LEGISLATION TO CLARIFY THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION IN CARRYING OUT DOMESTIC INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS.

TESTIMONY AT CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

IN PROVIDING SERVICE TO THE CONGRESS, THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL AND MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE STAFF FREQUENTLY TESTIFY AT CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS ON SUBJECTS ON WHICH THE OFFICE HAS INDEPENDENTLY OBTAINED AND EVALUATED INFORMATION ON FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES. THIS KIND OF ASSISTANCE HAS INCREASED RAPIDLY IN THE PAST YEAR.

FOR EXAMPLE, DURING THE FISCAL YEAR 1976, GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE WITNESSES TESTIFIED AT 140 HEARINGS BY CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES. DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR, THE NUMBER OF SUCH OCCASIONS WAS 69.

REPORTS

THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE COMPLETES OVER 1000 REPORTS EACH YEAR. REPORTS THAT ARE ADDRESSED OFFICIALLY TO THE CONGRESS GO SPECIFICALLY TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE AND TO THE UNCLASSIFIED

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. COPIES OF SUCH REPORTS ALSO ARE SENT TO ALL COMMITTEES WHO HAVE SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SUBJECT MATTER, TO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WHO REQUEST THEM, AND TO OFFICIALS OF THE FEDERAL AGENCIES CONCERNED.

COPIES ARE ALSO DISTRIBUTED OUTSIDE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO THOSE INTERESTED, INCLUDING NEWSPAPERS AND RADIO AND TELEVISION ORGANIZATIONS.

NEARLY ALL OF THEM ARE MADE PUBLIC--A DEMONSTRATION OF THE OPENNESS OF UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PROCESSES. MOREOVER, THE INFORMATION IN THESE REPORTS IS AS UNBIASED AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE. THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE DOES NOT LOBBY FOR A PARTICULAR LEGISLATIVE CAUSE OR PROGRAM. RATHER, IT TRIES TO PROVIDE OBJECTIVE INFORMATION TOGETHER WITH ANALYSES OF ALTERNATIVES

THAT CAN HELP THE CONGRESS TO MAKE RATIONAL DECISIONS.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

AS YOU CAN SEE, WE SERVE THE CONGRESS IN MANY WAYS AND I COULD
GIVE YOU MANY MORE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF SPECIAL STUDIES AND
INVESTIGATIONS THAT WE HAVE MADE FOR THE CONGRESS. BUT TIME
DOES NOT PERMIT.

AGAIN, LET ME ADD MY CONGRATULATIONS ON THIS FINE OCCASION
AND EXPRESS MY SINCERE APPRECIATION FOR INVITING ME TO DISCUSS WITH
YOU HOW MY OFFICE SERVES THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES."
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